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THE TLS

WILL PUBLISH A
SPECIAL NUMBER
ON ACADEMIC
PUBLISHING
ON MARCH 24

To the Editor

'Morality and Architecture'

Sir—When one publishes a controversial book one expects to provoke varied responses but I am puzzled by the tremendous hostility at Reynier Bauhaus in his review (February 17) of my *Morality and Architecture* since the objections he makes are so trivial. He begins by arguing that my claim that I have "no wish to question the value of the whole" is false. But he does not refer to my stated belief that no one since Ruskin has done more than I to open the eyes of the ordinary Englishman to his architectural heritage. I still maintain that recognition of that achievement is compatible with disagreement about much Pevsnerian ideology.

Bauhaus complains that I accept Pevsner's view of Morris as a Luddite when, according to a recent *Dumfries* article, Morris can be made to appear pro-machine "by quotation no more selective than Pevsner's". I do not see that a great deal can be made to hang on this point, nor on his next one in which he implies that I am unaware of one of the most famous of modern architectural books, Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (1949). I fail to see how reference to the "two telling pages and some heroic passages" in this book would have seriously altered or strengthened my arguments.

Bauhaus's next point concerns the interpretation of the use of glass in modern architecture. So far as I can see, we are probably in agreement about this. Then he attacks my passage on architecture as a "pity because quite a lot of people found it rather funny. He also disapproves of my use of the word 'prudent'; I shall be very happy to change this to 'desirable' in my future edition. In attacking me for mentioning that Pevsner used the word 'totalitarian' as a term of approval it is not clear whether it is because I am not the first to have done so or whether he thinks that the word does not have the grim implications generally ascribed to it. Nor will he allow any value in my pointing out that the word "historicism" has been misused. My argument is that in Pevsnerian language "historicism" and "historical" are always implicit value-judgments used to condemn without discussion nineteenth and twentieth-century architects who allow themselves to be influenced by tradition to earlier architecture like Alberti or Palladio, for example, the term is not applied. This constitutes misuse of a word which had been established by Popeye and many others to mean something quite different.

My claim that Lutyens is one of the two or three greatest English architects Bonham Hyde "preposterous". My impression is that Bonham is probably now in a minority in maintaining this view and that we are in for a Lutyens revival.

There were, of course limitations—some of them sufficiently strong to suggest that a psychoanalytic investigation into them might prove amusing. Why, for example, did Ogden absolutely rule out the verb "I want"—surely the base of everything? We had to teach instead the phrase "I have a desire for" which is hardly English. I was in sympathy with trying to limit the vocabulary as much as possible, and in my case I used to cheat and add odd another twenty words plus this vital verb. Otherwise, the human body, for example, was almost as rudimentary as the verb-scheme. It seemed to me to be going too far when the only way to break the expert's "milk-breasts" was to call them "milk-veins". But these strange flaws aside, Basic English is a wonderful invention and should be revived and relearned.

LAWRENCE DURRELL

c/o Curtis Brown, 1 Craven Hill, London W2 3EP.

The Times Literary Supplement

We regret that for this issue of the TLS it has been necessary, for reasons outside editorial control, to hand over or curtail some reviews and regular features.

A Blake Epigram

Sir—David Erdman was wrong to suppose my typewritten unhappy (Letters, February 24). It can be quite happily, now that it has served its purpose.

Her whole life is an Epigram, smoothened and nobly peened. Plotted quite neat to catch applause with a sliding noose at the end.

In quoting the epigram I introduced punctuation, expanded the contractions and modernized the spelling of OED lexicographers. Mr Erdman says "If we must punctuate, it would serve better to add a comma, as does Sir Geoffrey Keynes' epigram, smoothened (not punctuated), which was meant as the lightest hint likely to draw your readers' notice to Blake's selection of a different vocabulary item altogether from those in 'smoothen'." This is not an image suitable in an advertisement for peanut butter, but a good colloquial word of Blake's time: see OED *smooth* (also *smoothen*); "perfectly smooth, level, or even with the surface"—see, in Smollett's "They faced smoothened as if they had been clean shaven." Here "smoothened" might be either an adjective qualifying "epigram" or, secondarily, an adverb modifying "peened" (in the sense "written"). There are several shades of distinction in this extraordinarily condensed poem. Besides the ambiguities Mr Erdman mentions there are of course others: "plotted" can mean "braided" or "smoothened" and "peened" may not only mean "written" but also "feathered"—a heraldic sense activated by "nobly" in view of such possibilities, I can easily understand someone arguing against the hyphen on the ground (not Mr Erdman's) that it might cause off an ambiguity. That argument should not resist. But to argue that a comma is to rob Blake of his chosen word.

This is not a bad instance of how the awe of accidentals can blind editors to an author's meaning. Of course old-spelling diplomatic texts are indispensable for evidential purposes. But modernizing the spelling (not punctuation) also has advantages—not least, in obliging even the most confident editor to consult the dictionary. If I were editing the epigram, I should put "smoothen" and add a note about "smoothened". But no comma. No comma.

ALASTAIR FOWLER
Department of English, University of Edinburgh.

Among this week's contributors

JOHN BAYLEY's *An Essay on Hardy* was published last month.

Geoffrey Bosc is the author of *Mid-Victorian Britain*, 1971.

JOHN BOARDMAN's recent books include *Achilles Red Plague Vases*, 1975 and *Intaglio and Rings*, 1975.

HIMMELBULL is Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford.

PETER BOKKE is the author of *Venice and Amsterdam*, 1974.

ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL's *The Two Duchesses* will be published next month.

W. B. CARMICHAEL's *Confinement and Flight* was published last year.

P. L. CARSTEN's *Racist Movements in Austria* was published in 1977.

ALICE CLARE CARTER is the author of *The Dutch Republic in Europe in the Seven Years War*, 1971.

RICHARD COPE's most recent books include *Paris and its Provinces 1792-1800*, 1975, and *A Sense of Place*, 1975.

ALEX OR JONGE is the author of *Doctoresque* and *The Age of Intensity*, 1975.

ROBERT A. FERGUSON is Professor of English at the University of Chicago.

CHRISTOPHER FRY is the author of *Stereo Leone Inheritance*, 1964.

PETER KING is Professor of Dutch Studies at the University of Hull.

T. W. LAWRENCE is the author of *Prima in Britain*, 1974/75, 1974.

LOUIS LEUKEMAN is a Lecturer at the Institute of Modern Dutch Studies, Maastricht.

MARY LUTYENS is the author of *Millets and the Ruskins*, 1967, and *The Ruskins and the Grays*, 1972.

VERNON MALLINSON's books include *Young John in the English Revolution*, 1963, and *Gods of Belgium*, 1963.

JOHN MORGAN is the author of *The Force of Katoiridge*, 1975.

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Seeing with wide eyes

By Robert A. Ferguson

ANDREW SINCLAIR:
Jack: A Biography of Jack London
312pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £6.95.

The early deaths of Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Jack London—all born in the 1870s—mark the greatest tragedy of a literary generation in American letters. Crane died of tuberculosis in 1900 at twenty-eight and a new friend, the elderly Henry James, mourned the loss of a "great, great genius". Two years later Norris's life ended in appendicitis. He was thirty-two, hard at work on the last volume of his "epic of the wheat" trilogy, and full of plans for a new trilogy on the American Civil War. London died aged forty of an overdose of drugs in 1916. Now easily the most widely read American author of the day, the brief careers of these three literary naturalists give the novel of the period an oddly truncated quality. Their works evoke what William Dean Howells once called "a sort of longing and regret" for what might have been. We are left with a series of brilliant but flawed examples: books that promise much, but fall just short of the first rank in terms of range and maturity.

London's best books are distinguished by their narrative power, their sharp imagery, and their sheer readability. Andrew Sinclair's new biography correctly traces this distinct, simple style and sense of pace to Rudyard Kipling, that master of the plain tale. London himself admitted the strength of the influence of Kipling in his work. "I would never possibly have been anything near the way I did had Kipling never been." The plain

This combination has left wide latitude for critical judgment. Ultimately, however, Crane and Norris have been measured by strength held in common by all three writers, while London has been dismissed for shared weaknesses. Hence, the most prosa stylist of impressionism, and Norris, the father of American naturalism, have been given firm places in American literary history. London, the most versatile and prolific of the three, has become a lightly regarded author for boys until something of an intellectual curiosity. This controversial public life was written a period piece for examining American ideological inconsistencies at the turn of the century. As recently as 1974, Earle Labor felt the need to argue defensively for London as a major figure to American literature. And now Andrew Sinclair's *Jack: A Biography of Jack London* offers new information on the writer's life and traces the many contradictions in London's thought that have undermined his reputation. The strength of the biography lies in Sinclair's use of these contradictions to demonstrate the complexity of a writer who could with equal conviction play the role of committed artist and literary hack.

Between 1900 and 1915 London wrote fifty books, and a total of more than five hundred articles published in his time. He produced his best work in a very short time, often in a day, six days a week, over his sixteen-year period. He discarded nothing. I have no un-finished stories," he explained. "I start. If it's good, I sign it and send it out. If it's not good, I sign it and send it out." Typically, before Adams (1906), one of London's more popular novels, was written within just forty days. Such methods explain both the prodigious output of three books a year, and the "lucrative mediocrity" that London candidly predicted for himself as early as 1899. He wrote of products of haste, are many secondary characterizations, and some intrusive, and artificial dialogue.

Even so, the London canon includes several dozen short stories of great power, three significant novels in *The Sea Wolf* (1904), *The Iron Heel* (1908), and *Martin Eden* (1909), and several autobiographical works of considerable interest and value. Of the latter, *The People of the Abyss* (1903), the devastating study of slum life and urban poverty in the East End of London, and *Call of the Wild* (1903), a powerful study of the human animal, are two of the most important. *The Call of the Wild* (1903) is a powerful study of the human animal, and *The People of the Abyss* (1903) is a powerful study of the human animal.

Examples of this ability abound in *Jack*. To the story "The White Silence" London presents us with a long, eloquent description of the passive hostility of the frozen Arctic. "All movement ceases, the sky clears, the heavens are as brass; the sunlight whips, seems sacrilegious, and man becomes a child, frightened at the sound of his own voice. Solo aspect of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world; he trembles at his audacity, realizing that this is a message, a life, nothing, more." The rhetorical passage works so well in context because it is immediately preceded by a very convincing account of the practical problems and discomfort of living in the Arctic. This twelve-articles leading

up to and including the Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries 1910 heavyweight championship fight in Reno are impressive social documents and contain a careful defence of sports in literature to which Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer owe clear debts. London's coverage of a number of championship fights, along with such realistic boxing stories as "The Mexican" and "The Abyssal Bruin" and "A Piece of Steak" began a new genre in American fiction. Of course, any catalogue of London's important works must also include the phenomenally popular dog stories with their naturalistic stresses upon a more basic world and the Northland law of the club and fang. *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) have been translated into every major language and remain minor classics because of their unaffected simplicity and their intuitive use of myth.

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Design by the American artist Lynd Ward (b. 1905), from *A Treasury of Bookplates*; see page 249 of this issue of the TLS.

rather abrupt style that both London and Stephen Crane applied to the adventure story was of important innovation in the general literary world of Victorian America. But London's real creative genius flowed from an uncanny ability to enfold a reader within the truth of his imaginative worlds. The special verisimilitude that he gave to his settings is best conveyed in London's own description of the production of his story, *The People of the Abyss*. "I start. If it's good, I sign it and send it out. If it's not good, I sign it and send it out." Typically, before Adams (1906), one of London's more popular novels, was written within just forty days. Such methods explain both the prodigious output of three books a year, and the "lucrative mediocrity" that London candidly predicted for himself as early as 1899. He wrote of products of haste, are many secondary characterizations, and some intrusive, and artificial dialogue.

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All these experiences were converted into literary expression by London with immediacy and conviction. But this man of action and his expression leave a twofold problem for his biographer. First, one must ascertain the truth behind events that London was prone to embellish or to hide. Second, one must discover the nature of the thinking that behind the episodes of the adventurer, sailor, journalist, and farmer. This problem is far more difficult than one might first assume. London was a self-taught man of letters with many contradictory ideological views and a strong anti-intellectual and anti-academic streak. "It would be a good deed to break the heads of nine tenths of the English professors," roars Martin Eden at one point. Many critics are quick to dismiss London as a writer of popular fiction, but London's own descriptions of the production of his story, *The People of the Abyss*. "I start. If it's good, I sign it and send it out. If it's not good, I sign it and send it out." Typically, before Adams (1906), one of London's more popular novels, was written within just forty days. Such methods explain both the prodigious output of three books a year, and the "lucrative mediocrity" that London candidly predicted for himself as early as 1899. He wrote of products of haste, are many secondary characterizations, and some intrusive, and artificial dialogue.

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London's illegitimacy, his fear of venereal disease, his tolerant attitude towards homosexuality, and his use of drugs.

The treatment in *Jack* of London's intellectual contradictions shows a similar balance. London's Marxism, his racism, his devotion to the ideas of Herbert Spencer, his jingoistic nationalism, his rampant individualism, his socialist zeal in a household managed by servants all form impossible combinations that every critic and biographer has noted. Sinclair's contribution is to concentrate instead on London's own "lifelong obsession with making a coherent pattern out of the haphazard and the inconsistent." It is London's insistence that things must go together that attracts him to system-builders like Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx. "Work for a philosophy of life," asserts London in one revealing passage. "It does not hurt how wrong your philosophy of life may be, so long as you have one and have it well." Occasionally, he even turned his ideological tensions to artistic advantage. "South of the Slot" presents one protagonist in the split personality of Fred Drummond, a university professor and Big Bill Totts, a hard-drinking labourer and radical organizer. The ensuing struggle for psychological supremacy reflects London's own ambivalence between social aspirations and working-class aspirations. "While I have these two classes," wrote London, the social climber, "I hate to be out of grip with the old."

Against these contributions to an understanding of London, Jack unfortunately has its weaknesses. Sinclair's abuse of metaphor to convey authorial excitement and a sense of transition is the most irritating. The young London belongs to a "tumultuous family, blowing with the winds of future." The unsuccessful gold prospector must learn to "pon out the glimmer of his struggle, the gleam of some sort of victory never himself. He possesses a wild and artistic vision as a wolfpack." In this task, in Sinclair's phrase, the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 "burn" the chip on London's shoulder by destroying the evidence of his deprived childhood. Comment on *The People of the Abyss* is followed by an abyss within London himself where he begins "not to gild the jilly, but to flick red paint on his own wounds."

The failure of Jack to probe beneath the surface for the meaning of London's early collapse and death constitutes a more serious problem. Sinclair offers new information on London's many physical ailments and on his use of a variety of dangerous drugs to control pain. Always a hypochondriac, London suffered from an ever-increasing series of illnesses in his thirties, including chronic indigestion, dysentery, rheumatism, neuritis, pneumonia, tuberculosis, fever, contracted while in the South Seas, rheumatism, neuritis, and other kidney problems brought on by alcoholism and his mercurial temperament. Sinclair chronicles these growing difficulties in detail. Indeed, Jack dwells constantly upon London's failing body even when the evidence is vague or dubious. Early on, the struggling writer has worked so hard that his spine is "bent like a pipe-stem." A backache? By 1904, London "has smashed both knees and his right ankle in various tumbles" and once again "cripples" himself, wrenching his left ankle in a game. A sprain? Sinclair is far too loose with his descriptions here. He relies on London's own exaggeration in order to build an early thesis of physical decay to go with the latent evidence.

Of course, London's physical problems were only symptoms of a larger pattern of self-destruction that deserves much closer attention and explanation than Sinclair provides. Most of London's immediate illness can be traced directly to his failure to follow sound medical advice: concerning his alcoholism, poor diet, lack of exercise, and overwork. More meaningful, however, is the pattern of self-destruction that London's own exaggeration in order to build an early thesis of physical decay to go with the latent evidence.

London was a consummate writer. In 1908 he left unpublished a substantial work on Victorian literature, which has been prepared for publication by Kathleen Tilloison. The authors chosen for study belong to the "first generation" of Victorian writers: Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Trollope, Tennyson, and Browning. £8.95

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When Geoffrey Tilloison died in 1988 he left unpublished a substantial work on Victorian literature, which has been prepared for publication by Kathleen Tilloison. The authors chosen for study belong to the "first generation" of Victorian writers: Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Trollope, Tennyson, and Browning. £8.95

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several different jibes, thus come
and what they find on the phone. In
the past, they are all true.
"For the time being," they
write, "the file would remain open."
If that is the case, here are
a few suggestions:

1 Everything you hear is not cri-
minal. Particularly unreliable are
"insiders"—generally, the public.
"Insiders" include the Royal
"anti-party group" and politicians'
"memories."

2 Do not be misled by coincidence,
whether geographical or chronologi-
cal. It is not, for example, signifi-
cant that an anonymous telephone
call from a kiosk in Trafalgar
Square made "with a Royal
"Whitcomb." There are also the
National Gallery and St Martin's
Post Office to be considered, both
dealing with fugitives, but alone
without any connection. Why
you become excited because the
announcements of Harold Wilson's
resignation and the separation of
Princess Margaret and Lord Snow-
don took place in the same week
is not a matter of time. Nor should
your own history of the "him dog"
appeared in the same week as
Crufts.

3 Do not discuss (a) the Royal
Family with Lady Falkender or (b)
South Africa with Sir Harold Wil-
son.

4 Ruffled polichins have various
politics. Some on the "news" ca-
shiers are "The News of the World's
Greatest Cricket Eleven." Sir
Harold's pursuits is politics and he
enjoys speculating about political
moves and plots. Lady Falkender
sometimes helps him.

5 You noticed how members of
the Establishment help each other
in a job, losing the odd embar-
rassing file and so on. Remember,
too, that party leaders can stick
together and that, especially in the
case of Sir Harold, who is a kindly
man, assisting the cause of other
leaders may have nothing to
do with the state of party strength
in the Commons and a great deal
to do with rallying in another
member of the club. And, by the
way, such loyalties are not just on
the "establishment" characteristic. When
"Denis" loaned a gun to Andrew
Newton, "a dreamer, an unwarmer"

appeared virtually worded as in the original. If you do not mind me using the word "exactly" whilst I proceed about questions I and, as far as possible, who the journalists engaged were, and where each press conference was held (Nixon's seem to have been in different parts of the White House, and sometimes not in Washington at all), and whether—since I effect behaviour—the occasion was televised or not. Since the value of these conferences is, as events to themselves, rather than as evidence, the historian using them needs as much supporting detail as he can get.

4 Ruled politicians have various
 5 policies. Some on *The Times* cross-
 6 sword, others construct the World's
 7 Greatest Chicken.
 8 If Harold, pushing a politics and
 9 affairs speculating abm political
 10 moves and plots, Lady Falkender
 11 sometimes helps him.

5 You noticed how "members of
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It affects behaviour—the occasion was televised or not. Since the value of these conferences is as ovens to themselves rather than as evidence, the historian using them needs as much supporting detail as he can get.

...people are ready to help them
...way. These include: Peter
...the former Liberal MP
...and a defender of Norman
...and, if his own account is t
...moved.

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